

Indelible

Business



June 20th, 1942 This place must surely be Hell itself. I have been here for only a few months and it seems absurd that I am still alive.

127, 000 prisoners were executed immediately upon arrival, and thousands more have died working, freezing, or starving. All prisoners (boys and girls alike) are shaved and tattooed an individual number on our forearms. Kasper has already grown into a fine young man- at age nine. It truly saddens me to see the eyes of a man on the body of a little boy. Eyes that hardly ever shed tears.

Eyes that betray grief and despair. But even as our situation worsens with every passing day, I believe that Kasper has not yet given up all hope. The child inside of him still sees a way out. A way to live. He is the reason why I am still alive.

We hold each other up, and that is all that matters. Day after day, we toil and work in this camp. Meals are meager, and we barely receive enough each week to live on. There is a small hut out on the far side of the camp- that of Rudolf Spanner's. Rumors fly around camp like a bee to a jar of sweet honey.

Ava, a friend that I have come to make, tells me about a " soap factory"; apparently Doctor Spanner has been performing monstrous experiments on prisoners taken from the camp. There is said to be barrels of body parts floating in harsh-smelling water. Spanner has been trying to make soap out of human fat. " Rein judisches Fett," they say. Pure Jewish fat.

We find this extremely gruesome and hard to believe, so we wave it away as another ploy for the Germans to try to scare us mad. When we came, the guards told us to be ‘ proud’, for we were in the very first concentration camp to be built in Poland.. September 12th, 1942 It is nighttime and Kasper is dangerously ill. Father and I have been feeding him what we can, but his body violently rejects everything.

Bile and filth lay around his straw mat. His stomach is bloated and purple, and his eyes are a vicious shade of yellow. There is a strong stench of decay that floats around him, but we cannot find the source. He is dying. His health is declining much too rapidly. His words are stuck in his chest, and he cannot move his fingers.

Desperate for help, I run outside and try to find Ava’s cabin. I accidentally bump into a soldier, who squints down at me. “ What do you want?!” he barks. “ Go back to your cabin!” I plea with my eyes and pull him by the hand into our housing area. I can vaguely see his furrowed brow and wrinkled nose, but I don’t care. I show him my brother and demand for him to fix it.

The soldier seems amused that I should ask him such a thing. He has me wrap Kasper in a blanket and put him in a wheelbarrow that is staged outside the door. He tells me that Kasper will be transported to a nearby hospital. Once he gets better, he will be returned to camp. A man in an off-white uniform takes him away.

I sit in my bunk and wonder if I will ever see him again. I pray that I have made the right decision and assure myself and father that he will be back

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soon. February 12th, 1943 I miss Kasper. February 13th, 1943 Father has committed suicide. I am alone.

Ever since Kasper has been taken away, Father just works and sleeps. Had it not been for me feeding him every day, he surely would have starved to death months ago. I saw him through the window this morning. It was a common way for prisoners to take their own lives, so the guards paid him no mind. His bony body stumbled over to the electric fence that surrounds our camp. I heard myself scream, wake up everyone in our cabin.

It mattered not. I tore out of the housing area, howling like a deranged wolf. It looked like he was falling in slow motion- I saw his eyelids give way, his shoulders slump. Then he collapsed right onto it, face first. There was a deafening bang and a great deal of smoke. When I dared look up, his charred body was on the ground.

His head was rested two feet away. My fingers scraped the insides of my bloody palms as I sank to my knees, burying my face in the dirt. I wailed in anguish. Never in my entire life have I ever felt as lonesome as I did at that moment. May 5th, 1943 I have lost the will to live.

There is no more reason for me to try to survive anymore. I am tired and starving and miss my brother and father terribly. I don't want to work so hard every day. Every drop of sweat and scarlet blood is benefitting the German military in some way. I'm sick of helping my enemy, the ones who have done this to us in the first place.

Ava has become a skeleton, but props me up every day. She brings me my food and pushes me to work. This morning, it was different. Ava pulled me out of bed and sat me up. Pretending to help me fasten the buttons on my shirt, she waited until the rest of our roommates left the cabin. She set herself next to me and held my hand.

I could slide my fingers easily between hers. Ava then told me a story about her own family. Once upon a happier time, Ava had three siblings– two older brothers and one younger sister. Her father and older brothers were taken to a different concentration camp. Her mother, being pregnant with another child, was killed immediately upon arriving at Stutthof. Wendy, Ava’s younger sister, was taken by Lieutenant Schwarz to Dr.

Spanner for his experiments. At this point, Ava’s eyes fill with tears, and I squeeze her hand consolingly. I finally realized how selfish I had been. I only cared about myself and my own losses. I had never bothered to ask Ava about her family, but permitted her to take care of me.

I embraced her and allowed her tears to water my soul. Perhaps they will mold me into a better person. The acid in her tears will burn my selfish mannerisms. And our shared sorrow will teach me the greatest lesson of all: compassion. May 29th, 1943 Ava and I take care of each other.

She has become a sister to me; allies in labor and lifelines. Last month there was news of a revolt in the Warsaw Ghetto of Poland. Thousands of poorly armed Jews rose against their captors, something that will be remembered for years to come. “ Aufstand im Warschauer Ghetto,” it has come to be called. In the end, they were defeated.

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60, 000 people of the courageous militia were condemned to death. When Ava and I heard of the news, we dared not speak of it while guards and traitors were listening, but exchanged a look of elation at the thought of the fact that outside these fences, people were still fighting for our freedom and rights. Maybe somewhere out there beyond the fence lived hope; reason to keep fighting for our lives. September 19th, 1943 I can feel the life being drained from me. I will continue fighting with the remainder of my strength. Ava was killed yesterday.

In the middle of the night, I awoke when I heard struggling noises. Heels digging into dirt, muffled screaming. I peered out off the little, square window and reeled backwards in shock. Max Pauli, the man who ran Stutthof, was dragging Ava out of her cabin. He had one arm around her waist and one arm around her throat. His lips spoke poison in her ear.

Her eyes showed no fear- just hatred. She twisted in his grip and kneed him between the legs. As he keeled over in pain, a guard came to his aid and hit her across the face the same way they had hit my dear aunt. A sickening crunch was heard as his rifle made a dent in her skull. I watched my best friend die from a window, hiding like I had when my mother and grandfather were taken away. It felt like everything was happening all over again and I cursed myself for being such a coward, but I knew in my heart that there was nothing I could do.

Nothing was in my control. When the guards' footsteps faded away completely, I pulled myself through the window and tiptoed to her body. I crouched down and took her hand in mine. She was already dead. Her blood

pooled around my feet and mixed with the dirt between my toes. I placed a kiss on each of her cheeks and crossed her arms over her chest.

I prayed for her soul to continue to heaven, and silently promised her that I would never give up.